
EVALUATION OF VIVEKANANDA'S POLITICAL AND SOCIAL THOUGHT: AN OVERVIEW

Mangsatabam Runabala Devi,

Research Scholar, Glocal School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences,
The Glocal University, Mirzapur Pole, Saharanpur (UP)

Prof (Dr.) Ritesh Mishra,

Research Supervisor, Glocal School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences,
The Glocal University, Mirzapur Pole, Saharanpur (UP)

Abstract

Social and political thought is linked with the interplay of factors involving society, economy and politics. Political thought is a generalized term which comprises all thoughts, theories and values of a person or a group of persons or a community on state and questions related to the state. The purpose of this introduction is not merely to document the political ideas of those thinkers who changed the course of India's freedom struggle, but also to analyse the socio-historical contexts in which these ideas evolved and also the socio-political changes that these ideas aimed at. Since the book is about modern Indian political thought, it's obvious focus is on ideas that critically influenced the articulation of nationalism in India. Vivekananda showed the hollowness of such a materialistic philosophy of mind, matter and universe. Any polity resting on such a superficial conception of man and universe, he saw, was bound to crumble down. Therefore, he developed a philosophy of life which must pulsate every aspect of a system of political thought if it was to survive for long and if it was to exist for the maximum welfare of mankind. Vivekananda with a view to finding out any possible social and political system in his thought.

Keywords: Social and political thought, ideas

Introduction

Vedanta Religion and Socialism

To him religion is a key note of social and national life. This religion was the vedic religion. Vivekananda was a world spokesperson for Vedanta. Swami Vivekananda's vision of Vedanta is his lasting legacy to contemporary spiritual thought. Swami Vivekananda's ideas on nation-building in India come down to us through his concepts of 'Practical Vedanta' and 'Man-Making'. The Vedanta teaches men to have faith in themselves first. To him, the goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. He popularized yoga as the practical aspect of Vedanta. It elevates religion into spiritualism and at that stage all faiths, all scriptures, and idolatry appear to be different faces of the same truth. Swamiji felt that Indians are essentially bound by religious ties and only a spiritual elevation of religion could unite them beyond faiths, caste, community and sub-national and ethnic identities. Then and only then all Indians will be permeated by a common bond of nationalism. By the Neo-Vedantism of Swami Vivekananda is meant the new Vedanta as distinguished from the old traditional Vedanta developed by Shankaracharya.

Swamiji was an ardent supporter of Vedantic socialism. No doubt, Vivekananda took pride in the country's inheritance from the past, but he was not an obscurantist revivalist with indiscriminating admiration for all that had come down from the past. To him, India meant the people and the people meant the masses. Removal of poverty, eradication of illiteracy, restoration of human dignity, freedom from fear, availability of spiritual and secular knowledge to all, irrespective of their caste and class and the ending of all monopolies, religious,

economic, intellectual, social and cultural – all these formed a part of what he derived from his practical Vedanta or Vedantic socialism. Vivekananda's Vedantic socialism centres round his progressive ideas on education which are more modern than those of professional educationists who moulded the education of modern India. From the beginning of his mission, he stressed the importance of universal literacy as an essential condition for mass uplift and development. Though he laid great stress on the traditional values of chastity and family life for women, Vivekananda was totally against their subjection. Vivekananda's Vedantic socialism is also reflected in his endeavour to give India's traditional religions a new orientation of social service.

Social Reforms

Swami Vivekananda was a great social reformer. As a social reformer, he preached elimination of all exploitation. He has done many social activities to change the social problems. He felt that the three problems are the resistance of our progress: education, poverty and castism. Swami is considered as the messiah of downtrodden. Swamiji was the first leader in modern India to speak for the poor and the downtrodden masses. He travelled extensively within the country to understand their problem. He firmly believed that the main cause of Indians' downfall was the neglect exploitation of the poor.

According to Vivekananda religion is that will be equally philosophic, equally emotional, equally mystic and equally conducive to action. Religion is a social institution; worship is a social activity and faith a social force. Swamiji changed the focus of religion from God to Man on rather, to God in man. His master Sri Ramkrishna had taught him that service to man was service to God. Swamiji made this principle the basis of his social service programme. He taught that the best form of worship was to see God in the poor, the downtrodden, the sick and the ignorant and to serve them.

He was the first Indian represented India and Hinduism in the world parliament. Swamiji enhanced Indian prestige in the world through his speeches at the world parliament of Religion held in Chicago in 1893 and his subsequent work in America and England. Swamiji showed the universal relevance and significance of Indians ancient philosophy and spiritual culture in solving many of the problems associated with modern living. He enabled thousands of people in the west to appreciate Indian philosophy and culture.

He believed that socio economic change can be brought about through education. He wanted both moral and secular education to be imparted to the common man of this country. On 1 May 1897 at Calcutta, Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission—the organ for social service. The ideals of the Ramakrishna Mission are based on Karma Yoga. Swamiji laid the foundation for harmony amongst religions and also harmony between religion and science. He always said with his Guru, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, that, “religion is not for empty stomachs.” Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary, also called Swami Vivekananda Jayanti, is celebrated on January 12. The day is also observed as National Youth Day. Vivekananda had a firm conviction that for the youth, life is larger than livelihood. Their aim is to break the shackles of the established society to revolt against whatever breeds inequality, injustice, bondage of mind and all kinds of backwardness. Vivekananda welcomed the youth to come forward and join in the struggle for achieving freedom of all kinds, political, economic and spiritual. Vivekananda's clamant call to the Indian youth “Awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached” is resounding all through India, rousing their social consciousness and kindling their damp spirits. He felt that because the youth had no possession, they could be sincere and dedicated souls. They can sacrifice everything for a noble cause.

Vivekananda on Nationalism

Swami Vivekananda was a true nationalist in heart and spirit. He believed that there is one all dominating principle manifesting itself in the life of each nation. He said, “in each nation, as in music, there is a main note, a central theme, upon which all others turn. Each nation has a theme, everything else is secondary India's theme is religion. Social reform and everything else are secondary. Vivekananda felt that Indian nationalism had to be built on the stable foundation of the post historical heritage. In the past, the creativity of India expressed itself mainly and dominantly in the sphere of religion. Religion in India has been a creative force of integration and stability. When the political authority had become loose and weak in India, it imparted event to that a force of rehabilitation.

Hence, he declared that the national life should be organized on the basis of the religions idea. As supporter of this idea, he revived the eternal things of the Vedas and Upanishads to strengthen nation's growth and faith in its individuality.

Though growth of Nationalism is attributed to the Western influence but Swami Vivekananda's nationalism is deeply rooted in Indian spirituality and morality. He contributed immensely to the concept of nationalism in colonial India and played a special role in steering India into the 20th Century. Swami Vivekananda's nationalism is associated with spiritualism. He linked India's regeneration to her age-old tradition of spiritual goal. He said, "Each nation has a destiny to fulfil, each nation has a message to deliver, each nation has a mission to accomplish. Therefore, we must have to understand the mission of our own race, the destiny it has to fulfil, the place it has to occupy in the march of nations, the role which it has to contribute to the harmony of races". His nationalism is based on Humanism and Universalism, the two cardinal features of Indian spiritual culture. He taught people to get rid first of self inflicted bondages and resultant miseries. Vivekananda was an ardent patriot and he had tremendous love for the country. He was the embodiment of emotional patriotism. A nation is composed of individuals. Hence Vivekananda stressed that noble virtues like manliness, a sense of human dignity and honour should be cultivated by all individuals. These individualistic qualities had to be supplemented with a positive sense of love for the neighbour. Without deep sense of selfless service it was mere prattle to talk about national cohesion and fraternity.

To him, the nature of his nationalism is not materialistic but purely spiritual, which is considered to be the source of all strength of Indian life. Unlike western nationalism which is secular in nature, Swami Vivekananda's nationalism is based on religion which is life blood of the Indian people. Deep concern for masses, freedom and equality through which one expresses self, spiritual integration of the world on the basis of universal brotherhood and "Karmyoga" a system of ethics to attain freedom both political and spiritual through selfless service make the basis of his nationalism. He opined, "I am an Indian and every Indian is my brother." "The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahmin Indian, the pariah Indian is my brother." "The Indian is my brother, the Indian is my life, India's gods and goddesses are my God, India's society is the cradle of my infancy, the pleasure garden of my youth, the sacred heaven, the Varanasi of my old age." "The soil of India is my highest heaven; the good of India is my good."

Vivekananda was a keen student of History. Analyzing the historical facts available he comes to the conclusion that four fundamental social forces are ruling society in succession: Knowledge, military power, wealth and physical labour. These forces are in the hand of four classes, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. He points out the importance of each of the varna in social history and maintained that each will rule one after the other. After analysing the merits and defects of the three different kinds of rules Vivekananda prophesied that Sudra rule is bound to come in the near future: nobody can resist it. At the same time he predicted that during the Sudra rule, there will be spread of general education but the number of geniuses on talented people will be few. History shows that Sudras were condemned in society in different periods. They were deprived of all opportunities to receive education. If a Sudra is absorbed in a higher class he will be lost to his own community and may not feel any urge necessary uplift of his own community.

Swamiji was a great champion of the emancipation of women. In India there are two great evils. Trampling of the women, and grinding the poor through the caste restrictions. Manu, again, has said that God blessed those families women are happy and well treated. In western countries treat these women as well as can be desired and hence they are so prosperous, so learned so free and so energetic. But we have seen the opposite picture in our country, what is that our country is the weakest and the most backward of all countries. All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great. Their education must be an eye-opener in all matters. India is a country and Indian is a nation this feeling is national integration. Vivekananda feel that the main characteristics of Indian culture are unity among diversity. Race, religion, language, Government - all these together make a nation. In India race

difficulties, linguistic difficulties, social difficulties, national difficulties, all melt away before this unifying power of religion. Indian mind there is nothing higher than religion, deals that is the key note of Indian life. Swami Vivekananda's message of nationality and universality is very much relevant in the present day world. All people without any distinction of caste, religion, race, gender on nationality. Human society has to wait for centuries for the advent of a leader of mankind like Swami Vivekanand

Vivekananda saw the process of social growth and development in India and envisioned that a Sudra Raj was destined to come in India in the years and centuries ahead. Elaborating his concept of socialism, a little further. Vivekananda stressed the belief; Sitalpru socialism should be based on a social order in which diversity of capacity and occupation were allowed to exist, but in which privilege was totally abolished. Such a socialism should be ushered through culture and mutual esteem. The motto should be "From caste to socialism through culture." Socialism should not be divorced from culture but based on cultural equality. True socialism should be brought about through a process of progressive evolution in his social and economic inequalities got reduced gradually.

Conclusion

Vivekananda accepted the organic analogy of society but his organic conception of society did not limit only to each other organ functioning in relation to the other in order to maintain the social existence. In fact, such an organic conception of society was adopted in the West to enjoin upon individuals to be socially responsible to the State. But Vivekananda exposed the hollowness of such a view and put forward a new interpretation in the light of traditional Indian thought. When Plato treated individual as a part of an organic order, as a functioning unit of the State, he, in fact, was propounding a negative conception of human psychology. He, thereby, ignored the true relationship between individual and society. Also, he, emphasized only one aspect of individual's mind which was allowed to form at the cost of other aspects.

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